WHERE STREAMS RUN WITH PIECES-OF-EIGHT

Glint of Gold in the Waters of Tortuga Is Not Merely the Sparkle of West Indian Sunshine

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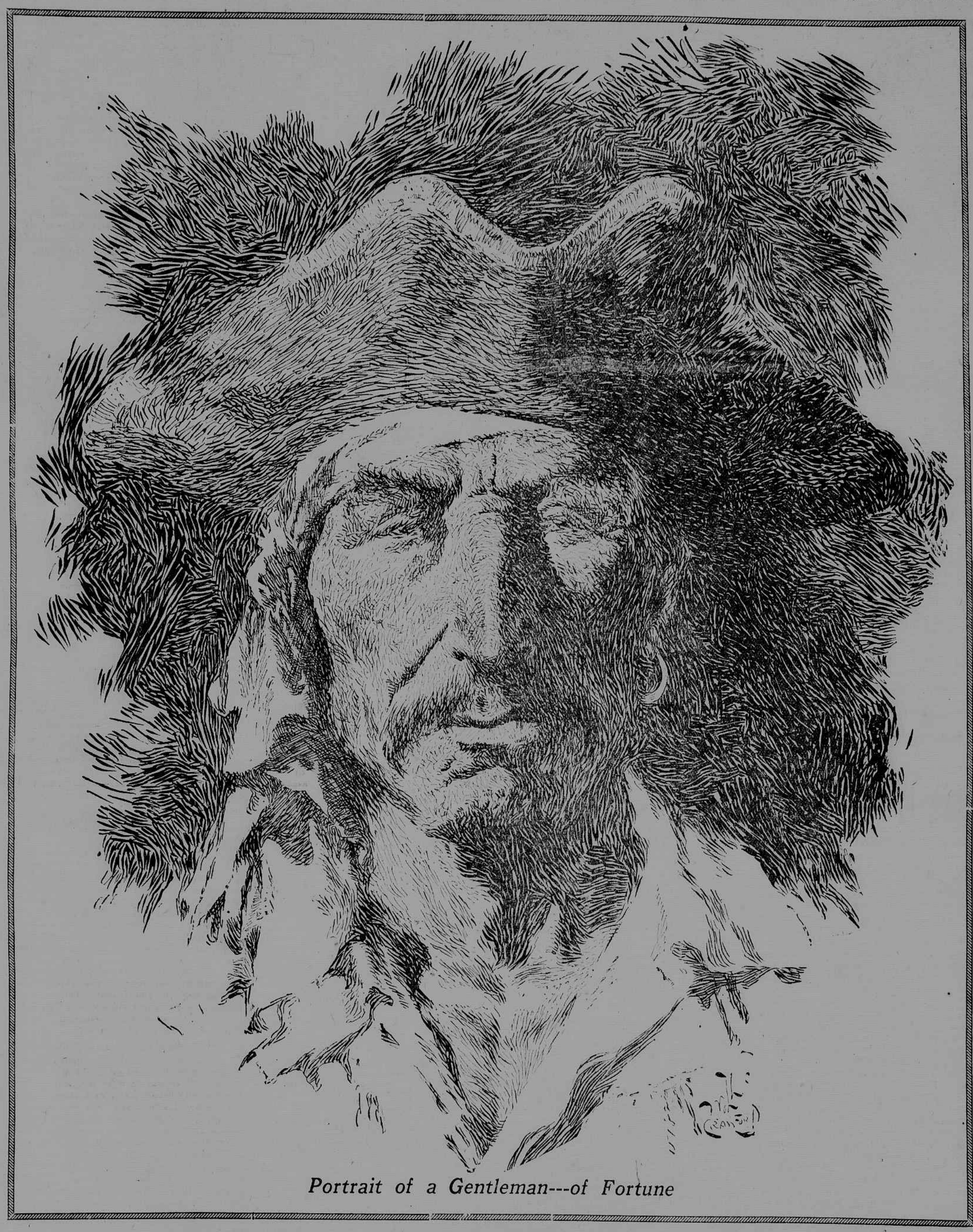
Somewhere Back in the Matted Hill Country Is the Mother-Lode of the Thrifty Buccaneers



Portrait of a Gentleman---of Fortune

PIRATE lore and tales of buried treasure, the romancing portrayed in distinctive American literature, which for many generations has thrown small boys, and their fathers before them, into spasmodic dreams of emulation, need not be all fiction.

Few may realize it, but our own nearby West Indies offers more genuine buccaneering history than perhaps any other single portion of the world. These islands, so closely bound to the voyages and history of Christopher Columbus, are only a trifle less famous for their part in another though less known history, the basis of which has inspired virtually all our piracy stories of fiction with the yellowed paper chart grasped in the hand of the pirate skeleton remaining to guard the secret of the buried chest.

The very "birth nest" of Western Hemisphere piracy is to be found in the Caribbean to-day. On the small island of Tortuga actual buried pirate treasure recently cropped out in golden reality to revive the past. This island is a few miles off the northern coast of Hayti and was named "Tortuga" by Columbus because it so much resembled the shape of the great sea tortoises—plentiful in the tropic vicinity.

A short time ago an old man from the tiny seaport of St. Louis, on the Haytian coast, sailed his dory across the choppy channel to Tortuga and anchored in the mouth of a small stream which tumbles down from the island hills. He was seining for small fish bait when glittering objects in the shallow water of the stream bed diverted his attention. He picked them up and they proved to be golden "pieces-of-eight." Here was actual booty from the Spanish Main, spoils cached in the coves and hills of Tortuga by the buccaneers of the seventeenth century.

The writer visited Tortuga in December, not so much in search of pirate gold as to compare the jungle-matted little island of to-day with the buccaneer rendezvous and stronghold of some three centuries ago. Pirate history relates circumstantially and convincingly that here piracy started and grew until it terrorized the coast lines and waters from the Atlantic and Gulf to Cape Horn and even into the Pacific. The boldest and worst of French, Dutch and English buccaneers outfitted their ships on Tortuga and returned thence after their raids to divide the plunder and outfit their ships for further expeditions.

I left the Haytian seaport of Port de Paix early one morning to explore Tortuga. Captain Howells, of the Haytian gendarmerie, commanding the port, placed at my disposition a black corporal armed with a .32-caliber pistol of ancient design, to act as guide. My own weapon was a twelve-gauge Winchester shotgun, carried mainly for wild pigeons—the same big blue birds that disappeared so completely and mysteriously from all North America many years ago. They exist in numbers on Tortuga.

The history of the place far overshadows the modern scene. To a lone white rambler objects constantly show which recall to mind such implements as picks and shovels, such documents as age yellowed charts, all connecting with a golden hoard somewhere beneath the earth contained in a rusted iron-bound chest. There is, unmistakably, the big tree, now towering high above a jungle-grown mass of a hundred different species of tropic flora. To look sharply and inquisitively along the four points of the compass from this tree is invariably to find the big rock with what seem time-worn crosses and pirate hieroglyphs on its surface. One may be hyperbolic without censure. All that appears necessary is the dying buccaneer's chart and, of course, the digging implements, preferably employed at night in the dim light of flickering lanterns. Poe and other writers of buried treasure have prescribed it thus, and thus it must be in the imagination.

The term "buccaneer" originated on the island of Tortuga. It is derived from the French word describing men who cured meat by the "boucan" process, a system of smoking the flesh on green sticks.

As early as 1630 the island of Hispaniola, which is to-day the island of Hayti, began to find French, British and Dutch settlers arriving there, much against the will of the Spaniards, who controlled the territory to the announced exclusion of all other nationals.

The interlopers first tried their luck at planting, but eventually abandoned this vocation to become "boucaniers," because of the great prevalence of wild oxen, cattle and wild boar. The vicissitudes of interloping, however, were such that many of the settlers fled to the island of Tortuga, which was separated from the main island by a strip of channel water seven miles wide. Tortuga offered less territory for the "boucaniers," but more security. Perhaps seven miles wide and twelve miles in length, the island was a virgin hunting ground.

Eventually came Pierre le Grand to the island of Tortuga. Pierre le Grand was the original pirate of the Western Hemisphere. All the crimes of the Spanish Main, much of the pirate lore and actual pirating which one may read about in books reverts directly on the shoulders of this Frenchman from Dieppe, who came with good intentions, but soon lost them. Boucaniering was tame to Pierre le Grande. He soon tired of it. He followed the meat curing trade only until his earnings gave him possession of a small sailing ship, and then he inveigled twenty-eight others to follow him off the path of righteousness.

Pierre le Grand was a gentler pirate than many of those who followed him in the trade. He found a Spanish vice-admiral on one of his prizes, and after impressing all those of the crew he needed as slaves, he placed the admiral and some others in a small boat to find the shore as best they could. He should have hung them to the yardarm or forced them to walk the plank. But records tell us that the admiral and his companions eventually landed to tell the tale near Tiburon, on the western coast of Hayti.

Pierre after a time put back to Tortuga with one of his prizes and the booty she contained. The haul represented several thousand pieces-of-eight, much plate and other treature. Members of the original crew were permitted to receive their divisions and go ashore. Pierre, however, continued on to France with the Spanish frigate, which was his first prize, and quit the pirate game forever. But his work had its well known effect. The remaining hunters and boucaniers of Tortuga saw greater gain in piracy, and immediately began to outfit ships to prey on Spanish traders.

Within two years the buccaneers of Tortuga had captured many valuable prizes, including two huge Spanish vessels loaded with plate from Campeche, in the Gulf of Mexico, bound for Caracas. They had also seized many ships of lesser burden, all of which, combined with the larger tonnage, gave them a formidable fleet, armed with cannon and swarming with men who fought savagely with dagger, pistol and cutlass for the gain that piracy promised.

Among the notable pirate leaders who succeeded Pierre le Grand—the father of piracy—was one Rock Brasiliano, a Dutchman, who took this nom-de-plume by reason of long residence in Brazil. Rock's procedure discloses why he withheld his right name. He was a real pirate, a true maker of present-day tradition. Though an excellent leader in combat, "howbeit, in his domestic or private affairs he had no good behavior nor government over himself," says his chronicler, who added: "Many times being in drink, he would run up and down the streets, beating or wounding whom he met, no person daring to oppose him or make any resistance. To Spaniards he always showed himself to be very barbarous and cruel . . . of these he commanded several to be roasted alive on wooden spits."

Pirates were generally a pretty bad lot, agrees pirate history. For example, they would spend two or three thousand pieces-of-eight in one night, not leaving themselves peradventure a good shirt to wear on their backs in the morning. Rock Brasiliano was only one of those given to swashbuckling, and his particular pleasure was to buy a whole keg of wine, which he placed in the middle of the main thoroughfare, threatening to "pistol" all who refused to drink with him. On other occasions he varied his diversion by procuring barrels of ale or beer, which he scooped out with his cupped hands on all who passed.

Possibly the cruelest of them all was Francois L'Ollinais, a Frenchman, who outfitted the first ship for his piratical career on Tortuga. The enemies of this terrible Gaul received no quarter, and he became known as a true terror of the seas, amassing great wealth. Once the Spanish governor of Cuba sent an expedition against L'Ollinais, who had captured a city on the southern coast of the island. Several hundred buccaneers, led by the terrible Frenchman, met the Spanish force and annihilated it.

L'Ollinais, with his fleet, sacked and burned several towns on the coasts of Central America and Cuba and put most of the inhabitants to the sword. More prizes were taken at sea, and at the end of two months there was so much loot on hand that the fleet sailed to the Isle de la Vache (Cow Island), south of Hayti, to divide 4,060,000 pieces-of-eight, tons of jewels, silks, linen and other commodities of trade. The fleet then sailed for Tortuga, where the available supply of rum and brandy was soon entirely inadequate for the celebration of the most successful buccaneer cruise in the history of buccaneering.

There was no Volstead act in force on Tortuga at the end of this champion pirate cruise. The price of liquor was dictated only by the law of supply and demand, the former overwhelmed by the latter. A gallon of choice brandy soon jumped to the unheard-of price of four pieces-of-eight and rum was soon at a premium at the profiteering demand of from two to three pieces-of-eight for four full quarts. The celebration only waned when all the liquor was consumed at these unprecedented prices. The inebriated pirates gambled their shares away with reckless abandon until the whole rested in the hands of a few. These secretively watched their chances to bury the loot in the valleys, coves and troves of Tortuga for future reference. Who knows how many of these treasure-burying pirates lost their lives on subsequent cruises, breathing the secret of the trove to their most intimate pirate pal at the last gasp or scrawling the rough chart on a bloody piece of paper as death stiffened the fingers? Who knows how many of these treasure chests lie buried under the jungle soil of Tortuga to-day?

Save for about two hundred illiterate negroes, living in tiny settlements here and there, the island of Tortuga is deserted at present. Pirate history means nothing to these blacks. It meant nothing to the old St. Louis fisherman who went recently to Tortuga for fish and came back with golden pieces-of-eight.

Numerous other buccaneer leaders who made their names dreaded on the waters of the Spanish Main and on the coast lines of the southern part of the New World after the "pilgrim pirates" set the pace were known as Sawkins, Sharp and Coxon. Piratical expeditions under these less able leaders were prone to mutinies. If the crew of a pirateer disliked the captain it would mutiny, force him to walk the plank and hold an election. These free lance mutineers combed the seas from the southern tip of South America far north into the Atlantic, enduring fearful hardships, fighting with extraordinary bravery against ships usually far larger and better manned than their own. It comes from the diary of one of these later day pirates that a forced visit to the island of Juan Fernandez, off the coast of Chile, found this island crowded with goats and birds and the shore dotted with multitudes of seals and sea lions. It was the isle of Juan Fernandez, which later became known through the exile there of Alexander Selkirk and Defoe's subsequent story of Robinson Crusoe. Under date of January 3, 1679, the pirate's diary reads:

"We had terrible gusts of wind from the shore every hour. This day our pilot told us that years ago a certain ship was cast away upon this island, and only one man saved, who lived alone on this island for five years before any ship came this way to carry him off."

As Selkirk, popularly believed to have been the original in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, is reported to have been marooned here early in the eighteenth century, it would appear from the diary of 1679 that Selkirk was not the first unfortunate to suffer being cast away alone on Juan Fernandez.

No part of the West Indies escaped piratical visitations. The Caribbee Islands, inhabited solely by redskins, who knew nothing of gold or bad habits, were frequently called upon. Esquemeling, the chief of pirate historians, tells of the Caribbee customs, notably that of the widowed Caribbee woman, who was obligated by custom to carry choice foods to the grave of her husband for twelve months and after that dig up the bones, scrape and polish them and carry them on her back for another year before she could marry again. It was the popular belief, says Esquemeling, that the devil ate the food, "but I myself, not of this opinion, have oftentimes taken away these offerings and eaten them instead of other victuals. To this I was moved because I knew that the fruits used on these occasions were the choicest and ripest of all."

THE HON. MISS ALICE

"MISS ALICE," as Miss Robertson, the new Congresswoman from Oklahoma, is already known in Washington, took the newspaper women at the capital into her confidence a few days ago and confessed why it was she had never married. It was at their weekly luncheon, when Miss Alice was the guest of honor. "I've been too busy to marry," she declared, "and I've worked with men on a fifty-fifty basis. Except when I took an examination and was discounted for my petticoats, they forgot I was a woman.

"There was a certain hotel in Oklahoma," she went on, "where men only were accommodated. But whenever I went to that hotel there was always a place for me. When the manager was asked one day why it was that he took no women guests and yet put me up he replied: 'Oh, Miss Alice; she's no more trouble than any other man!'"

And yet no more motherly, or even grandmotherly, type of woman could be found than Miss Alice Robertson. Sixty-seven years old, her straight gray hair brushed back from her forehead and over her ears, her face seamed with lines of care and hard work, her blue eyes crinkling with a smile or brimming with tears, the new Congresswoman looks precisely like thousands of other women her age who go on our errands of mercy or keep the home fires burning while the younger generation jazz about.

Her whole life has been one of service for the weak and the unfortunate—beginning on an Indian reservation and winding up in a cafeteria, where those who could pay for food were charged a little bit more to pay for those who couldn't. No wonder she had no time for romance. But even if she is an "old maid," hundreds of children and soldier boys, who have benefited from her bounty of love, call her "mother" and "grandmother." Out in Oklahoma a little girl stood gazing one day at the famous Red Cross picture "The Greatest Mother of All." Turning to her mother, she protested: "But that's a mistake, mother, Miss Alice is the greatest mother of all."

A frivolous male person asked the reporter after the press club luncheon whether Miss Alice was the type of woman who would cry in Congress. "Yes," I answered, "if she feels like it, and have all her colleagues weeping, too, for that is what she did to us to-day!"

Such pathos and humor! First the story about the three maimed doughboys—pieced together from the wreck in France and sent home to die—one with a broken neck, another with both legs gone and shell shocked, and the third blind and tubercular. Miss Alice administered the last rites to all three, and in the absence of the mother of one of them took his dying message to his "sweetheart, my ma."

And while we searched madly for handkerchiefs came a laugh that washed away the tears as Miss Alice told an amusing incident in her campaign. It was of rolling the carriage containing the two babies of one of her Democratic friends outside the polls on Election Day while the friend went in and voted against her!

"I haven't any weakness," admitted Miss Alice, "unless it's reading detective stories, and that," she added, apologetically, "is probably because the paper is rough, the print large and I know they aren't true, so I hope you won't hold it against me. And I don't know much about national politics. But I'm not too old to learn. Up at the hotel where I live, on Capitol Hill, I sit in the lobby and do a lot of listening."